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#### 24. MIMICRY OF A CROW CHICK BY AN ASIAN KOEL *EUDYNAMYS SCOLOPACEA* AS A DEFENCE AGAINST ATTACK BY HOUSE CROWS *CORVUS SPLENDENS*

The Asian koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* is a common brood parasite of corvids, mynas and other species throughout India and much of southeast Asia. In India, this cuckoo's predominant host is the house crow *Corvus splendens* and to a lesser extent the jungle crow *C. macrorhynchos* (Lamba 1976). This author has observed that the high populations of house crows in towns and villages accounts for the large concentrations of Asian koels that may sometimes occur there. Despite the commonness of this brood parasitic relationship, the exact way in which Asian koel gains access to the hosts' nest for egg laying remains a point of controversy.

An interaction observed between an Asian koel and a group of house crows in the village of Anjuna, Goa on December 17, 1999, at a time when house crows were breeding in the area, may throw light on this question.

##### OBSERVATION

At dusk, about 1800 hrs, a group of five house crows were seen noisily chasing a female, or perhaps a juvenile, Asian koel. The latter alighted in the top of a coconut palm and was immediately surrounded by the house crows that were cawing loudly and aggressively. One crow moved within *c.* 30 cm of the Asian koel, and

seemed about to launch a pecking attack. At that moment, the Asian koel responded to this threat by opening its mouth wide to reveal the bright red gape, which was held upwards, and emitting a call closely resembling that of a begging house crow chick.

This display by the Asian koel resulted in an instantaneous halt to the attack by the approaching crow, while the other four crows also became silent and passive. After about two minutes, during which time no further aggressive behaviour was displayed by the crows, the Asian koel slipped away into the semi-darkness of the coconut grove. The light was now failing rapidly and after a few minutes more of perching around abstractedly, the crows also flew off singly.

##### DISCUSSION

House crows are well known to behave aggressively towards both sexes of the dimorphic Asian koel, particularly during the breeding season, chasing them on sight even far from nest, sometimes physically attacking them (Hume 1889; Lamba 1963) and even in rare cases killing them (Lamba 1976). The peak breeding season for house crows in southern India is April to May but some breeding, as in the present case, takes place in November and December (Lamba 1963).

Given this aggressive behaviour on the part